



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

# News Release

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## **VASE SEIZED BY ICE FROM GETTY MUSEUM RETURNED TO ITALY** *Rare, hand painted "Calyx krater" dates back to 340 B.C.*

LOS ANGELES – A 2,300-year-old vase that was allegedly smuggled out of Italy and ended up in the Getty Museum's antiquities collection arrived in Rome this week, capping a joint effort by Italian authorities, the United States Attorney's Office, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to return the artifact to its original home. The vase was flown from Los Angeles to New York Tuesday where it was placed on a connecting flight to Rome.



Italian authorities traveled to Los Angeles and took possession of the ancient vase Monday under a consent judgment negotiated by the United States Attorney's Office and signed by attorneys representing the Getty Museum. In that judgment, the Museum voluntarily agreed to return the krater to the Italian government.

The krater, considered one of the best works by renowned Italian vase painter Asteas, has an appraised value of approximately \$350,000. According to the forfeiture complaint filed in the case, the vase was unearthed by a laborer doing maintenance work on Italy's canals during the 1970s. Initially offered a price of one million lire, the worker told Italian authorities he ultimately traded the artifact to a notorious Italian antiquities trafficker in exchange for a pig.

In 1978, according to the forfeiture complaint, a former Getty curator saw the krater in Switzerland where it was held by a private owner and two years later arranged for the Museum to bring it to the United States on loan. After three years, the Getty formally purchased the artifact from a European art dealer, Gianfranco Becchina, for \$275,000.

In 1999, Italian authorities made an official request to the United States government seeking return of the krater under the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty. In response, the United States Attorney's Office in Los Angeles filed the forfeiture complaint last year naming the Asteas krater as the defendant, leading ICE to lodge a seizure warrant against the artifact. In mid-September attorneys for the Getty Museum signed off on the consent judgment, paving the way for the vase's return to Italy.

"ICE's mission is to prevent the illegal movement of people and goods across our nation's borders - be it human beings, high-tech weapons, narcotics, or works of art," said David Nehls, assistant

special agent-in-charge for ICE investigations in Los Angeles. “Seeing this vase returned to Italy is particularly gratifying because it represents an important part of that country’s culture and history.” In a statement issued by the Italian Consulate in Los Angeles, Italian authorities expressed gratitude for the assistance and cooperation ICE provided throughout the entire operation.

The Italians intensified their efforts to secure the vase’s return earlier this year because they maintain the artifact is a crucial piece of evidence in the trial of two Americans on charges of antiquities trafficking, Marion True, the former curator of antiquities at the Getty, and Robert E. Hecht Jr., a prominent U.S. art dealer. The trial is due to resume in Rome next week.

The charges in that case stem from a 1939 Italian law prohibiting the unauthorized removal of objects from that country that are deemed to be of artistic or historic interest, meaning that any artifacts taken from tombs or ruins since then and sold without government permission have been illegally excavated and exported.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.*